



Ron C. Cross

## INCORPORATION/CONSOLIDATION - Fact/Fiction

By Ron C. Cross, Board of Commission Chairman

There has been much presented recently about the need to incorporate and consolidate the Columbia County government. This is a complicated topic, and some clarifications based on questions asked about incorporation and consolidation are listed below:

**1. Consolidation has not benefited the situation in Richmond County, what makes you think it will work in Columbia County?** The City of Augusta and Richmond County merged two existing, operating governments. The problems with this have been outlined in previous communications. We will maintain the present government structure without change. There are no competing bodies to create problems or additional cost. There is no real comparison in what has happened in other consolidations in the state and what can happen in Columbia County.

**2. What are the changes that will take place in government operation?** This is so simple that it is difficult to understand. There are no changes in government operation. We will have the same number of employees, no one is hired or fired, the millage rate remains the same, and the government structure remains as dictated by the Georgia Constitution. The only difference is that we will enjoy the advantages of being both a county and a city, and the name may or may not change, depending on the desires of the residents.

**3. This is really just a hidden tax increase, isn't it?** As stated above, the tax rate will not increase. However, there will be a franchise fee added to your natural gas and telephone bill amounting to about three per cent. This fee would only be added on those bills and should amount to less than ten dollars per month. This allows us to collect the franchise fee that is already being charged on the electric bill but we cannot receive – this alone amounts to about \$2.5 million a year. All franchise fee monies have already been committed by the Commission for capital improvement projects. This commitment could avoid a tax increase in the future for the same needed projects.

**4. Why should we give the government more money to waste?** The Commission has no interest in adding to the general fund. However, accelerating some transportation and stormwater projects with the franchise fees would benefit the entire County. These fees would also allow us to purchase more greenspace and meet recreational needs. It is a tremendous opportunity to help the County both now and in the future.

**5. What will happen to the Cities of Grovetown and Harlem and to the communities like Evans, Leah, Martinez, Phinizy, etc.?** All will retain their identity and function as they are currently. Grovetown and Harlem will continue to collect their franchise fees but will not be able to annex property. The County Commission will work with the Cities so that our plans do not adversely affect their continued existence and value to the region.

**6. Why do you want to change our excellent County?** As Columbia County continues to grow, we become a bigger and more respected voice in the region and in the state. It is time that we are able to compete on an equal basis with cities like Savannah, Macon, Columbus, Augusta, etc., in economic development, in tourism, in financial grant reception, in name recognition, and in the ability to be competitive with any city and/or county in the nation. It also concerns us that all home and business owners in Columbia County have been paying franchise fees to Georgia Power for years and not one cent has been returned to the county. This is not the fault of Georgia Power - it is because only cities receive these fees from energy utilities. Incorporation and consolidation will not affect our great quality of life but only allow us to expand it.

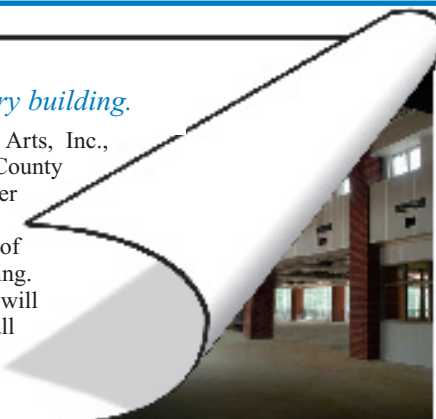
**7. What is the next step? Where do we go from here?** We will continue to answer questions and provide information to various community and civic groups and encourage our legislative delegation to allow you, the voters, to decide this issue next summer in the primary election. We feel that Jim, Ben, Barry, and Sue support our efforts but want to make sure that they, and you, understand all of the plans. Barry Fleming is the city attorney for Harlem and has a dual interest and this will be beneficial in our intent to make this a plan suitable for all.

Many thanks to Georgia DOT District 9 Representative, Bill Kuhlke, Jr., and the State Transportation Board for meeting in Columbia and Richmond Counties last week. Special thanks go to Mr. Harold Linnenkohl, GDOT Commissioner, and the Board for allowing the five-lane section on Washington Road to extend to Gibbs Road. We have been working closely with DOT for the past year to avoid the suggested raised concrete median. The median will now start at Gibbs Road and continue west to Kiokee Creek in the current widening projects. Thanks to our legislators for their assistance also!



## Sneak Peek! Preview the new library building.

On Saturday, January 21, 2006, Columbia County Arts, Inc., Friends of Columbia County Library, and Columbia County Chamber of Commerce will host a black tie gala as a fundraiser for the new Columbia County Library, Performing Arts Center, and Amphitheater. Please join us for this grand evening of entertainment, fine foods and wine, and preview of the new building. Tickets are \$100 per person and are tax deductible. All proceeds will go towards the opening of these new facilities in April 2006. Call 868-3484 for more information.



## Pollution Kills.....Are You a Fish Killer?

The next time you take a walk around your neighborhood, take a moment to notice the openings or inlets that line the roadways. These openings, also known as storm drains, capture stormwater run-off from the roadway and channel it through pipes and ditches to alleviate and prevent flooding.

A little known fact is that pollutants commonly deposited on our roadways, driveways, and in our yards are transported by stormwater and discharged into the storm sewer system. Eventually, these contaminants find their way to our local waterways such as streams, creeks, and the Savannah River. Aquatic wildlife, such as plants, fish, and other small critters, depend upon a clean environment. When that environment is threatened by pollution, these organisms can die. Columbia County has joined a nationwide effort in educating local citizens on the harmful effects of illegal dumping of chemicals, yard wastes, sediment, and oil and grease from automobiles into our storm drains.

In Columbia County's first inaugural marking event, Boy Scouts Troop #538 volunteered to mark 70 storm drains and distribute informative brochures educating residents on how they can become a part of this important campaign against pollution. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the Stormwater Utility Department at 855-RAIN (7246) or send an e-mail to [preventpollution@columbiacountyga.gov](mailto:preventpollution@columbiacountyga.gov).



## Columbia County Public Transit

Effective November 1, 2005, there will be an increase in Public Transit fares due to rising fuel costs and an increase in demand for public transportation. The last increase in public transit fares was approved in 2001.

Beginning today:

- Riders under 60 years of age - increase from \$3.00 to \$4.00 each way.
- Riders 60 years and older - increase from \$2.00 to \$2.50 each way.
- Fees for children 12 years and younger will remain the same - \$1.00 each way. Public Transit services are open to all Columbia County residents.
- We offer safe, clean, and dependable transportation with affordable rates.
- Our service is available on a regular basis, and our drivers are friendly and well trained.
- Transit services are "curb to curb" and staff is not allowed to leave the vehicle unattended or enter a business or residence in order to provide service.
- Transportation is provided to and from education, employment centers, shopping, medical, and recreational facilities and general places of business.

Service Requirements:

- We require one business day advance notice for scheduling.
- Our earliest drop-off appointment is 10 AM and our latest pick up appointment is 3:30 PM.

We serve all of Columbia and Richmond Counties except for areas south of Gordon Highway.

## Proud to be an American

For the third consecutive year, Columbia County school children will be observing and celebrating PROUD TO BE AN AMERICAN MONTH during November. It provides us all an opportunity to talk about patriotism, share pictures and stories of relatives who have served their Country well, and proudly fly America's flag. On November 18th, the Final Celebration will be held at First Baptist Church of Augusta at 7:00 PM. This culminating event will showcase the children and the public is invited.

## 2005 Winter Sports Registration

### BASKETBALL

October 31st - November 19th

Monday - Friday Oct 31st - Nov 10th\* 8 AM - 5 PM  
Monday - Friday Nov 14th - 18th 8 AM - 7 PM  
Saturday Nov 19th 9 AM - 1 PM



Registration at Patriots Park Office ONLY!

\*Columbia County offices will be closed Nov 11th for Veterans Day.

Youth basketball registration for boys ages 6-15 and girls ages 6-16. For more information please call, 863-7523. LIMITED SPACE!

NEW!! Spring Soccer Registration will be held January 2006 - games will be played March/April timeframe.

### REGISTRATION FEES:

**First Child - \$55.00 Second Child - \$50.00 Third Child - \$40.00**  
ALL OUT-OF-COUNTY RESIDENTS DOUBLE THE ABOVE FEES

Please bring birth certificate, if first time playing for the Columbia County Recreation Department.

Registration may be mailed in - must be postmarked by Nov 16th.  
(Please include check or money order made payable to CCRD)

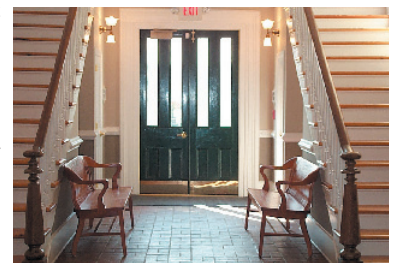
## Appling Courthouse Ribbon Cutting



On November 4th, the Columbia County Board of Commission will be having a ribbon-cutting at 2:00 PM to open the renovated Appling Courthouse to the public. The building will be open for viewing from 2:00 - 5:00 PM that day.

In 1812, a courthouse was built in Appling, and that structure became the core for a new courthouse built in 1856. In 1980, renovation of the building including the addition of central heat and air conditioning was completed. Interestingly, the original solid wood doors from the earlier courthouse are still in use today.

As the County has grown, it was increasingly obvious that the Appling Courthouse was too small to serve the population, and it was impossible to make another addition due to property size. In 1998, the County citizens voted to build a courthouse annex in Evans and to restore the Appling Courthouse so that it could continue to be used by Superior Court and County government, and it would retain its status of being one of the oldest functioning courthouse in Georgia.



The Honorable Richard W. Story, U.S. District Court Judge, will dedicate the building. The public is invited to the ribbon-cutting and to visit this beautifully renovated building on November 4th from 2:00 to 5:00 PM!